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DRAFT REPORT

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COORDINATION QUESTIONS: REVISED SYSTEM-WIDE PLAN OF ACTION FOR AFRICAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT (item 5 (b)) AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM-WIDE SPECIAL INITIATIVE ON AFRICA (item 5 (c))

1. At its 8th meeting, on 16 June 1997, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed revision to the System-wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (E/AC.51/1997/6) and the progress report on the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (E/AC.51/1997/7).

Discussion

2. A number of delegations expressed concern and regretted that the reports submitted did not establish the linkages between the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, the System-wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development and the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. They noted that while the New Agenda and the System-wide Plan of Action had been adopted by the General Assembly, the Special Initiative had emerged as an initiative of the United Nations system.

3. Some delegations noted that because the System-wide Plan of Action was not being effectively implemented, the Secretary-General and the Administrative Committee for Coordination (ACC) had launched the Special Initiative in March 1996 as an operational arm of the United Nations system in its efforts to implement the New Agenda. Several delegations also noted that the Initiative

held great promise for Africa as it focused on a selected number of well targeted priority areas where tangible results could be realized in a short period of time.

4. A number of delegations sought clarification on the intergovernmental process that established the priority areas of the Special Initiative and ensured its ownership by African Member States. The Committee was informed that the scope, orientation and priority areas of the Special Initiative derived from the objectives and goals of the New Agenda and those of the resolution on the Relaunching of Africa's Economic and Social Development: Cairo Agenda for Action.[1] The Committee was further informed that the Special Initiative had been endorsed in 1996 by the Economic Commission for Africa's Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development, and Planning at their twenty-second meeting, and that the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its meeting at Harare in June 1997 had requested that the pace of implementation of the Special Initiative be accelerated and that the resource commitment, especially by the Bretton Woods institutions, be honoured.

5. A number of delegations expressed great concern at Africa's continued critical economic and social situation. They recognized that a number of initiatives and programmes had been launched in favour of Africa, but that so far little had been accomplished. Several others expressed concern over the proliferation of initiatives which could lead to confusion and duplication of efforts.

6. Some delegations also sought clarification about the level of resources required and anticipated for the implementation of programmes under the Special Initiative. The Committee was informed that the strategy under the Special Initiative emphasized the rationalization of the use of existing resources. There was, however, considerable potential for the mobilization of additional resources from bilateral and multilateral sources to leverage national programmes particularly through sector investment programmes. The level of resources to be mobilized would depend on individual country needs.

7. Some delegations also mentioned that debt was a critical impediment to African development requiring further effort by the international community. In that regard, the recent initiative by the international financial institutions on multilateral debt was definitely a step in the right direction and should be continued and improved. Other delegations believed that the conditions governing that initiative should be relaxed.

8. One delegation expressed reservations regarding subparagraph 12 (a) relating to the proposed assessment of water policies and subparagraph 15 (a) relating to the proposed review of water legislation of the report on the proposed revision of the System-wide Plan of Action (E/AC.51/1997/6).

9. Some delegations underscored that peace, stability and capacity-building were essential prerequisites for African development. Some delegations expressed appreciation for the role of UNESCO in implementing the initiative on basic education for all African children.

10. Several delegations underlined the importance of regional cooperation and integration, and economic diversification in Africa's development, the two priority areas in the New Agenda that were not directly covered or explicitly addressed under the Special Initiative. One delegation questioned the rationale for the establishment of a special fund or facility for Africa's commodities. The same delegation noted the importance of economic liberalization and the creation of an enabling environment for the development of the private sector in the promotion of diversification, and stressed that regional cooperation and integration strategies should take full account of the implications of a globalizing world economy.

11. A number of delegations commended the efforts by African countries to implement the New Agenda and highlighted the importance of South-South cooperation in order to support those efforts. In that connection, the same delegations noted that the Asia-Africa Forum II had recently been held at Bangkok, (11-13 June 1997), to discuss the question of economic cooperation and development and also as part of the ongoing preparations of the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development. The Forum was noted as a good example of interregional collaboration, especially in the context of South-South cooperation.

12. A number of delegations observed that the present arrangements for coordination of the implementation of the New Agenda were not transparent enough to allow for a clear understanding of the respective roles of the units involved.

13. Some delegations welcomed the Special Initiative as the most practical way to support African development. In that regard, it was stated that the System-wide Plan of Action had no clear indication on commitment of resources by the organizations of the United Nations system, and that the Special Initiative was much more specific in that respect and could therefore be considered the focus of developmental action for Africa. Some other delegations nevertheless felt that the Special Initiative did not cover two priority areas, namely, regional economic cooperation and integration and diversification of African economies. The same delegations pointed out that there was no clear commitment on the funding of the Special Initiative of the priority areas.

14. A number of delegations pointed out that global coordination was essential and, therefore, concrete implementation of programmes and effective action for global coordination should be enhanced.

Conclusions and recommendations

15. The Committee took note of the two reports. The Committee reiterated the concern already expressed at its thirty-sixth session on the proliferation of initiatives on Africa and the need to avoid duplication and stressed that the issue of financial resources required for implementation had not been addressed satisfactorily under either the System-wide Plan of Action or the Special Initiative.

16. The Committee recommended that, in view of the fact that the two areas of regional cooperation and integration and economic diversification were critical priority areas in Africa's development, the ACC Steering Committee for the Special Initiative should make the necessary arrangements for the elaboration of comprehensive programmes in respect of those areas, including measures for the mobilization of adequate resources to buttress such programmes under the Special Initiative.

17. The Committee stressed the importance for an effective communication strategy to mobilize all the relevant parties and stakeholders under the Special Initiative in order to achieve results at the country level and to contribute to reinforcing African countries' ownership and leadership of the programmes.

18. The Committee recommended that, in order to assist in establishing a functional linkage between the New Agenda and the Special Initiative, the latter henceforth be referred to as the "United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of United Nations New Agenda for the Development for Africa in the 1990s". In that regard, the Committee also recommended that:

(a) The global political advocacy and policy setting of the renamed Special Initiative consistent with orientation guidelines and priorities deriving from mandates set up by Member States remain under the leadership of the Secretary-General;

(b) General follow-up of the implementation of the Special Initiative and support to the Secretary-General's advocacy role within the established policy framework continue to be entrusted to the office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries;

(c) Action-oriented activities for the implementation of the Special Initiative, including operational and coordination arrangements at the global, regional and national levels, follow-up, monitoring and mobilization of resources for concrete projects and programmes continue to be carried out by ECA and UNDP.

19. The Committee called upon the Secretary-General to rationalize and enhance the coordination mechanisms of the United Nations system at the national, regional and global levels to ensure that there was a clear delineation of responsibilities and to avoid possible duplication of efforts among the United Nations units and agencies involved in the follow-up, implementation and monitoring of the Special Initiative and the New Agenda.

20. The Committee recommended that, in order to ensure that future reports were more substantive and comprehensive, the relevant units responsible for coordination and implementation of programmes at the regional and country levels as well as the Inter-agency Task Force on African Economic Recovery and Development be more fully involved in their preparation.

21. The Committee requested that a progress report on the renamed Special Initiative, which should include, inter alia, measures taken in response to the recommendations in paragraphs 18 and 19 above, be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its thirty-eighth session.

Notes

[1] Resolution AHG/Res.236 (XXXI) adopted on 28 June 1995 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at its fifty-first ordinary session (see A/50/647), annex II.